

Bush Open To Taking V.P. Offer

CIA Nominee Says He Won't Seek Office

By Norman Kempster
Washington Star Staff Writer

George Bush pledged today to take no part in partisan politics while CIA director but he refused to rule out accepting the Republican vice presidential nomination.

Bush, the former Republican National Chairman whom President Ford picked to succeed William Colby as CIA director, said he would not "renounce his political birthright" to accept the vice presidency if offered.

Appearing at the Senate Arms Services Committee's hearing on his confirmation, Bush said he had no apology for his political service, four years as a Republican House member from Texas and two years as GOP national chairman.

"I DO NOT view political experience as a detriment," Bush said. "I view it as an asset; but I also recognize the need to leave politics behind the minute I take on the new job if confirmed."

"If confirmed, I will take no part, directly or indirectly, in any partisan political activity of any kind," he said. "I will not attend any political meetings. I will give no political speeches nor make any political contributions."

But on the subject of his possible selection by Ford to be on the GOP ticket next year, Bush first repeated Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's remark that it was "presumptuous" to withdraw from consideration for "something I am not in consideration for."

He added, "If some individual or group comes forward promoting me for vice president when I am director of CIA I will instruct them to cease such activity."

BUT, TURNING to the only way a vice presidential candidate is ever really named — selection by the presidential candidate — Bush said, "I cannot in all honesty say that I would not accept. I don't think any American should be asked to say he would not accept."

Bush won lavish praise from the senior members of the Armed Services Committee. Chairman John Stennis, D-Miss., called him "a gentleman that as far as I know has an honorable public career, a man of capacity and integrity."

The senior Republican on the committee, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, hailed Bush's appointment and gave up the opportunity to ask questions of the nominee, indicating that he was satisfied with the nomination.

SEN. STUART Symington, D-Mo., told Bush he had made "a very impressive statement, based on the remarks that have been made, it looks that you have already been confirmed." But Symington, in effect, forced Bush to pledge that he would volunteer to Congress information about CIA wrongdoing even if the lawmakers failed to ask about it. In the past, CIA directors have often answered the questions of Congress without providing information beyond the narrowest response to the question.

Symington asked Bush if he "would volunteer anything that was wrong."

"I am confident that I would cooperate fully," Bush responded.

"That is not a direct answer," Symington said.

"The answer is yes," Bush said.

BUSH STRESSED that his experience as U.S. envoy to Peking and as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations gave him valuable insights for the job as CIA director.

Bush said his experience in China particularly had impressed on him the value of a strong U.S. intelligence operation.

Referring to the leaders of China, Bush said, "I saw more clearly through their eyes the importance of being strong as a nation, particularly concerning possible problems from the Soviet Union."

At the same time, Bush pledged to prevent abuses by the CIA in the future.

"Investigative reporting by major newspapers and investigative work by the Senate and House have brought to light some abuses that have taken place over a long period of time," Bush said. "Clearly, things have been done that were outrageous and morally offensive. These must not be repeated and I will take every step possible that they are not."

STENNIS TOLD Bush that it has been his observation that it takes at least a year for a CIA director "to get on top of the job." He asked Bush if he was willing to devote that much time and effort.

"I certainly will make that commitment," Bush said. "I have no other plans. There is a lot of learning to do."

Stennis remarked that he was unsure why Bush would want the job which he said was politically as much a dead end as "being mayor of New York City."

"I didn't seek this job — I was riding my bicycle in Peking, coming home from church, when I received a message," Bush said. "It was out of a clear blue China sky that this come to me. There is nothing political in this for me — it is a duty to my country."

MORI/CDF